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The recruitment, selection, orientation, and effective use of volunteers in Child Development Centers are discussed. Volunteers with professional skills can serve as physicians, nurses, teachers, and social workers. Lay volunteers can relieve regular staff members of routine duties and increase the effectiveness of professional services.

Volunteers fall into two groups, each of which should be recruited and oriented in different ways. Parents of children enrolled in the Center and other residents of the immediate neighborhood comprise the first group; representatives of the larger community comprise the second group. In selecting volunteers, preference should be given to parents, for their participation would strengthen their identification with the Center and encourage them to adopt techniques taught there. Word of mouth is an effective recruitment technique for parents and neighborhood residents; mass media are also useful. Each volunteer should be interviewed. If accepted, he should attend at least one orientation session, should be introduced to some basic principles before beginning work, should understand the Center's goals, and should understand the broad nature of his duties.

Guidelines for effectively using volunteer services are that the number of adults in a room should be small, the volunteer should be placed in a comfortable position, the duties for inexperienced workers should be simple and carefully explained, and the volunteers should attend the regular meetings of the paid staff when possible.

Possible problems concerning volunteers include professionals who may resent volunteer participation, lay volunteers who are sensitive about their amateur status, and parent volunteers who find it difficult to remain neutral in situations involving their own children.

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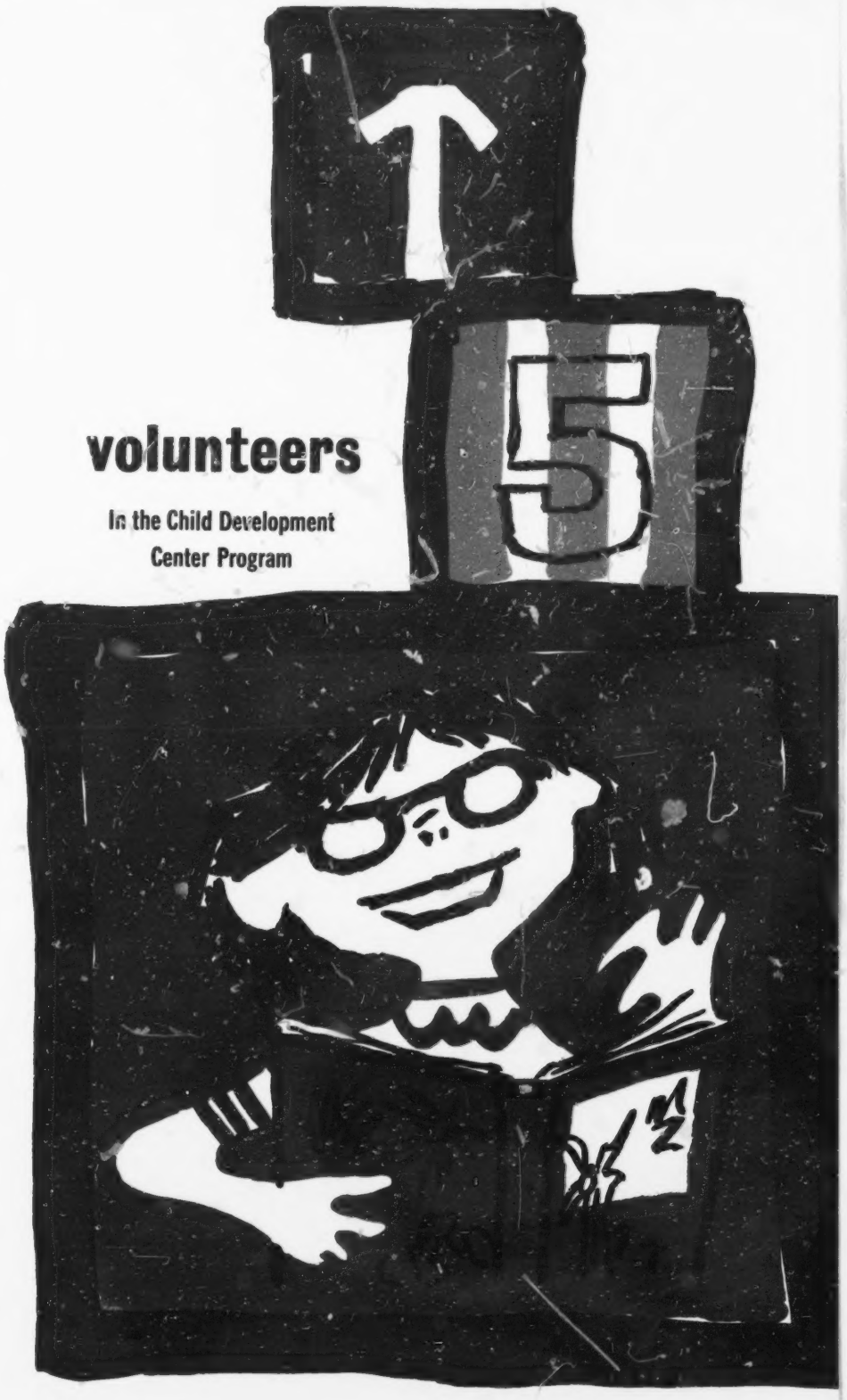

volunteers

In the Child Development Center Program

Office of Economic Opportunity, Washington, D.C.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE
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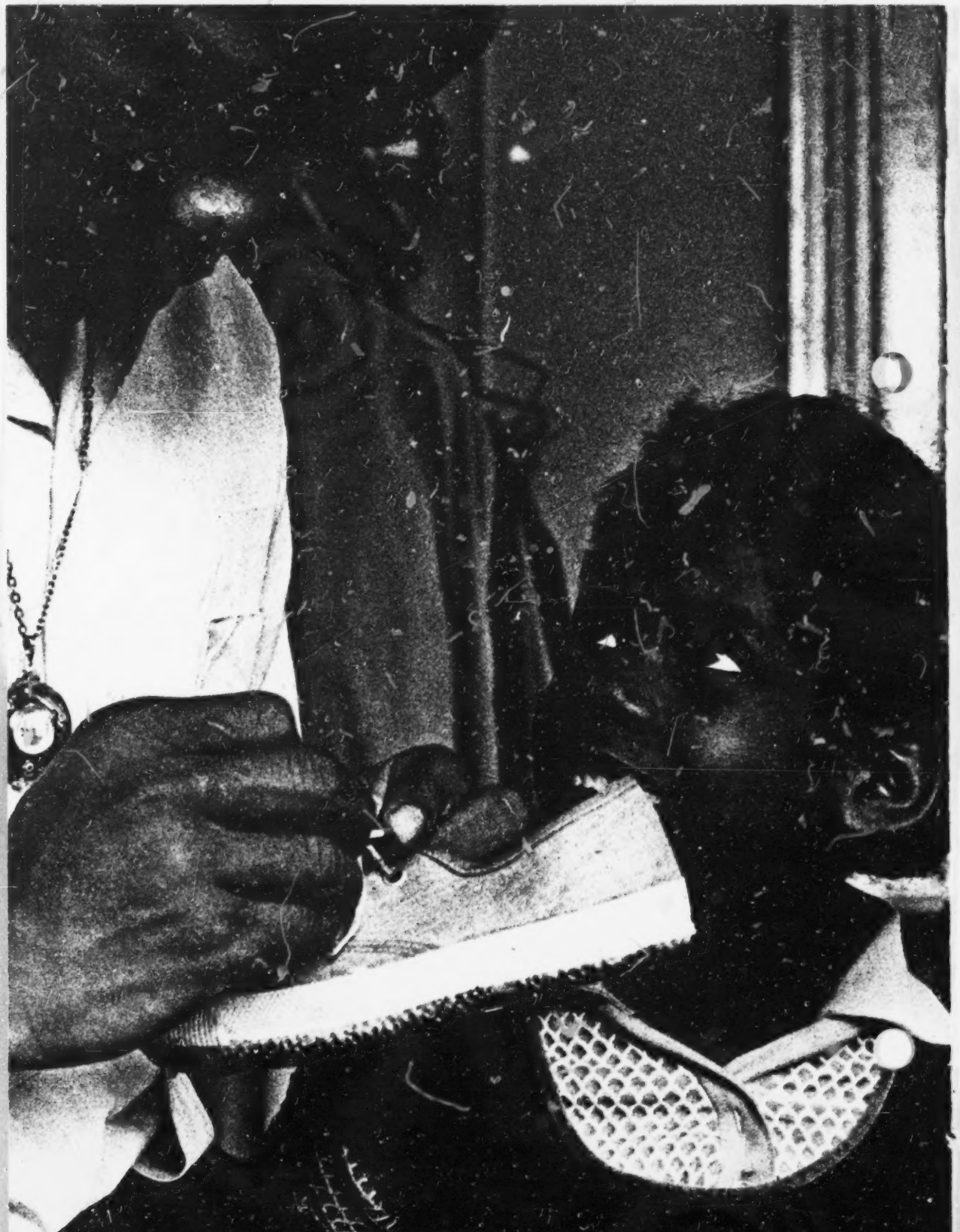
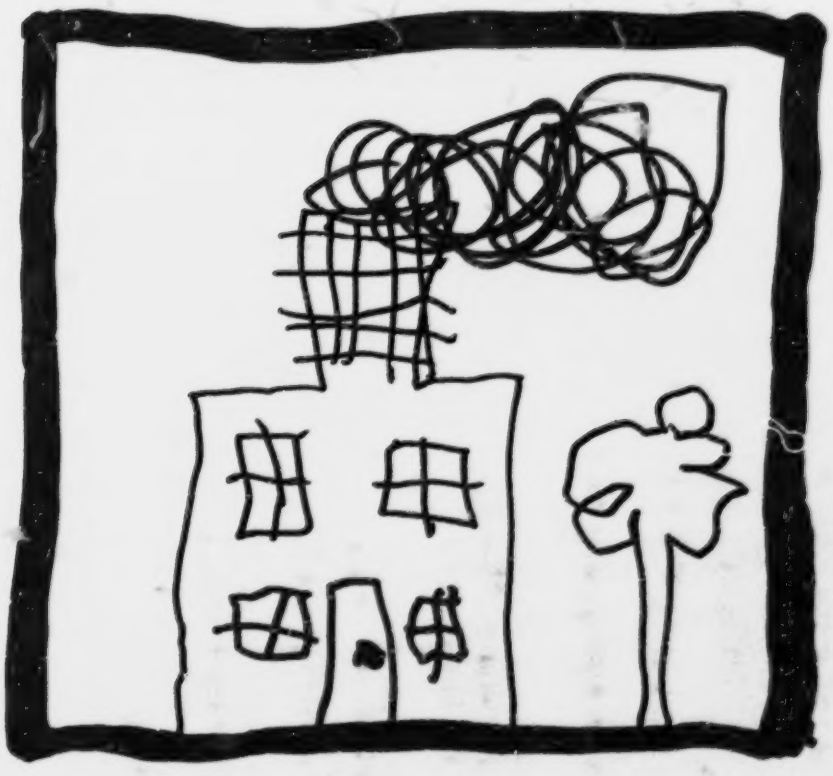


THE CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER

The Child Development Center is both a concept and a community facility. In concept it represents the drawing together of all those resources—family, community and professional—which can contribute to the child's total development. It draws heavily on the professional skills of persons in nutrition, health, education, psychology, social work, and recreation. It recognizes both paid and volunteer non-professionals can make important contributions. Finally the concept emphasizes the family is fundamental to the child's development. Parents should play an important role in developing policies; will work in the Centers and participate in the programs.

As a community facility the Child Development Center is organized around its classroom and outdoor play areas. Ideally it should also provide a program for health services, parent interviews and counseling, feeding of the children, and meetings of parents and other residents of the community. The space is arranged so as to permit working in small groups or individually with the children. Where some activities are performed at other locations, the staff should function as an integral part of the Center.



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VOLUNTEERS IN THE CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Introduction

Volunteers can play an important role in Child Development Centers. Those with professional skills may serve as physicians, nurses, teachers, social workers or in other professional capacities. Lay volunteers can relieve regular staff members of routine duties and increase the effectiveness of professional services.

More than this, volunteers can provide a unique range of experience and talent. Some volunteers will come from the immediate neighborhood, some will be parents of children enrolled, others will come from the larger community. Their diversity in background and experience can add new feeling and dimension to the program as a whole.

Volunteers with a flair for working directly with pre-schoolers will be particularly valuable to the program. They may have special aptitudes for listening to children and helping them learn how to relate to a variety of new situations and people. And their leisurely approach can both benefit the children and relieve the professional staff, whose time is more limited.

Administrators of Centers will find it worthwhile to make the greatest use of volunteer talent. An effort should be made to attract as large a number of qualified volunteers as possible.

SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers fall into two groups, each of which must be recruited and oriented in different ways.

Parents of children enrolled in the Center and other residents of the immediate neighborhood would comprise the first group; representatives of the larger community would fall into the second.

In selecting volunteers, preference should be given parents. Their participation would strengthen their identification with the Center, increase their understanding of the developmental processes of young children and encourage them to adopt approaches and techniques taught at the Center. This would give helpful continuity to their children's growth.

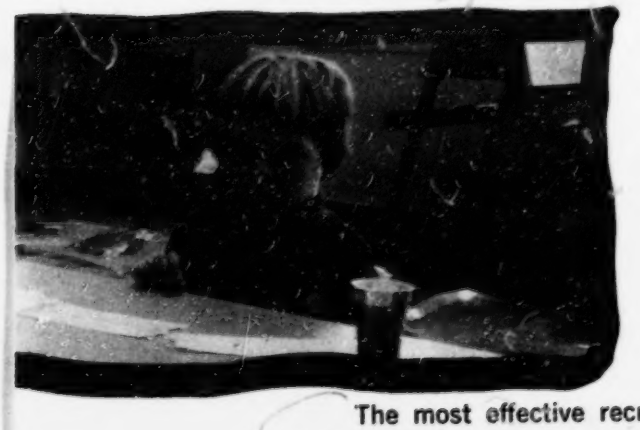
Other volunteers from the immediate community will be able to interpret the customs, traditions and values of the neighborhood to staff members; and present the objectives and accomplishments of the Center to the neighborhood. Volunteers from outside the immediate neighborhood may perform a similar interpretive function to the community as a whole.

In general, volunteers may be men or women, young or old, VISTA volunteers, housewives or regularly employed people who can donate time after work.

The one qualification most necessary for a volunteer is a dedication to the welfare of children and a willingness to commit time and energy in their behalf. Those who work directly with children should enjoy the young, take pleasure in working with them and listening to them and be willing to learn more about fostering the processes of growth and development.

However, volunteers may be individuals with strong intellectual and emotional commitment to the ideals of Project Head Start but unable to work directly with the young. Their skills can be well utilized in work which does not bring them into immediate contact with the children, such as cooking, providing maintenance and transportation services, securing help and equipment from outside groups and professions or interpreting the project to the public.

A desirable characteristic which should be cultivated in volunteers is a sensitivity to the values of different cultural patterns of behavior. Mixing volunteers from divergent backgrounds can expand the horizons of all participants and help them grasp the significance of habits different from their own.



The most effective recruitment among parents and residents of the immediate community is probably by word of mouth. The Center may wish to establish a neighborhood recruitment committee composed of representatives of church groups, school or settlement house parents' groups, neighborhood improvement societies, public housing organizations, senior citizens associations or other appropriate neighborhood groups. Such a committee could be helpful in enrolling children as well as volunteers, and could serve as a valuable liaison in the community.

Mass media may also be effective in appealing for volunteers. Speakers stressing the need for volunteers to lodges, service clubs, granges, churches, unions, women's clubs and other organizations could get coverage in local news media. These groups could provide individual volunteers, others may offer to perform certain tasks or complete projects as a group.

ORIENTATION OF VOLUNTEERS

The perceptive director will establish orientation programs to meet the needs of different groups of adults who want to work as volunteers. However, some general principles apply to all.

Each volunteer should be interviewed—preferably by the director—before he is accepted. In the initial interview the director should be able to gauge the individual's motivations, assess his potential contributions, and decide the kind of responsibility he may effectively assume. From such an interview the volunteer learns clearly the goals of the Center and something of its leadership, and becomes better able to decide if he wishes to serve.

After the volunteer is accepted, at least one formal orientation session should be held. As many more formal or informal sessions as possible should be arranged during the working period.

Full and part-time volunteers, particularly those not professionally trained, should be introduced to some basic principles before they begin to work. They must understand the goals of the Child Development Center and its concern with the total physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of the children. They must absorb the general approach to children created by the staff. In particular, staff members should stress that the job is not to entertain children, nor to interfere with constructive activity, nor to expect four-year-olds to act more mature than they really are. Supplementary readings in the field should be made available.

Volunteers should know the broad nature of their duties and responsibilities. They must realize they have undertaken a serious service, one with a fixed schedule, specific demands and some supervision of activity. They should understand that the Centers expects of them the same quality of effort, reliability and cooperation demanded of the paid staff.

From the beginning, volunteers must know lines of authority within the Center and where they stand in the administration. They must understand to whom they turn in a conflict or when rules and responsibilities need clarification. They should be encouraged to express their feelings within the Center.

Staff members cannot spell out in advance all rules concerning the children, but basic regulations pertaining particularly to the safety of small children should be explained. New volunteers may appreciate advice on such matters as what kind of clothing to wear, what activities are most popular, and the like.

Volunteers from middle-class neighborhoods will appreciate an opportunity to learn the different customs, values and habit patterns of the people with whom they will work. Each volunteer may encounter forms of behavior that seem strange or unintelligible, or attitudes that appear suspicious, rejecting or

condescending—even when such an impression is unintended. Some advance notice of what to expect will help ease their job.

Each staff will have to determine how to conduct this delicate orientation; its success will add to the harmony and cooperative spirit of the entire program.

People from middle class neighborhoods, for example, should know they may meet attitudes of seeming indifference, hostility or resistance from residents of the immediate area. Many of the underprivileged have known representatives from the outside community only as persons of authority—policemen, school attendance officers or welfare workers—who were thought to be interested only in "checking up on us."

Volunteers from the larger community should be advised that establishing friendly relationships may take time and patience. They must be willing to be tested over a long period before winning acceptance. "What's in it for you?" may sometimes be the response of those they meet; simple good will on the volunteer's part is not enough.

The middle-class volunteer must learn to tread a narrow path between being too anxious to please—and perhaps appearing condescending—on one hand, and being unresponsive to individual needs on the other. Neighborhood residents are intelligent and sensitive; years of unhappy experiences may have made them hypersensitive to patronization or condescension.

Volunteers should know some of the customs prevalent in the Center's neighborhood. For example, time means different things to different people; the underprivileged are likely to be less prompt about keeping appointments than middle-class representatives. The volunteer who takes a child from his home to the Center may have to remind the family in advance to make sure the child is ready. A blithe approach to time can be a form of resistance to middle-class standards but the volunteer who expects it should not be upset or annoyed if it appears.

Volunteers who understand neighborhood child-rearing practices will better understand the behavior of the children. Some families let their children stay up late to watch television. The next morning, parents may go to work early, leaving their children without breakfast. Thus, the cranky, irritable child left at the Center may simply suffer from hunger and fatigue. The volunteer who knows this can deal more successfully with his behavior.

Wild fabrications may be another barrier erected to repel outsiders. The knowledgable volunteer confronted with repeated distortions from children or adults can recognize the real message of that behavior: "I will not let you inside my defenses to find out what I really am." The volunteer must be patient and understanding, and may have to wait until the period of testing ends before seeking a realistic relationship with the individual involved.

The middle-class volunteer must be careful in her choice of words and should not be surprised if she is misunderstood. One executive in a program for a depressed area asked neighborhood residents to go out "those doors," pointing to an exit behind him. Residents misinterpreted this as meaning the back door, and resented the expression. Such phrases, innocuous to the uninitiated, may provoke great hostility. The volunteer must cultivate sensitivity to the other's experiences to learn which words and actions are acceptable.

It may be difficult to be considerate without seeming too eager to please. Neighborhood residents know people occasionally show flashes of anger or irritation to those considered as equals. A person who constantly suppresses natural responses may seem to be condescending or "too nice." Volunteers must learn to relate naturally to all their colleagues. This can become one of the dividends of the program.

Project directors should expect the disadvantaged to know more about middle-class behavior than the middle-class volunteer knows about the poor. Through the mass media, particularly television, the disadvantaged have an opportunity to learn at least the superficial aspects of middle-class behavior; they base their action on stereotypes acquired in this second-hand fashion.

Neighborhood volunteers will need some clue to the actual behavior of individuals. It may help them to know that people from the larger community are concerned about promptness; particular about certain health and hygiene practices; and apt to devote time and energy to planning for objectives that are attainable only in the distant future, if at all.

In general, if a volunteer—whatever his class or background—learns to put himself in the other's position; if he is willing to wait and prove himself and if his motivation is sincere, he can expect to win acceptance and friendship. As the program proceeds, volunteers from varied class and cultural backgrounds working together will educate each other. The children of the Center will profit.

USING VOLUNTEERS EFFECTIVELY

Although there are many volunteer jobs in any Child Development Center, the number of adults in a room must be kept low. It is possible to over supervise children so that they do not take initiative or complete work for themselves.

The needs of the teacher must be considered. The right number of adult helpers can enrich a program; too many can create confusion in organization and administration.

Too many adults with little to do can be distracting. For example, they may congregate to talk together and distract the children. However, behind-the-scenes jobs exist where adults can contribute without being in the way.

Volunteers may be scheduled to come regularly for a full day's work; they might come on a fixed part-time schedule or they could serve for specific jobs when necessary.

WHAT CAN VOLUNTEERS DO?

Volunteers can work in the office, keep records, answer the telephone or handle purchasing, accounting and other business arrangements.

They can construct and repair toys and equipment; organize field trips; work with community representatives to find additional equipment, books, records, pictures or other materials to enrich the curriculum.

Volunteers can help make the Center attractive by sewing curtains or framing pictures. They can make the Center more functional by making smocks and aprons, building cupboards for storage, or installing shelves low enough for children to reach.

Doctors may volunteer to give physical examinations; dentists may offer to perform dental evaluations; nurses can provide daily health inspections. Nutritionists may help plan meals; public relations experts may work with public officials, civic organizations and news media to create support for the program. Professionals of many specialties may lend their talents in consultation with the staff.

Some volunteers may enter directly into the educational program. Those who know about machines, trucks, animals or gardening might come in for spot jobs when needed. Some could lend unusual talents: singers can teach children songs; musicians can play instruments and instill in young children a love of music; artists can teach children an appreciation of color, line and form. These specialized volunteers may assume responsibility for one segment of the program.

Other volunteers, with staff supervision, can read stories to the children; they can see that finger paint is mixed, clay ready and art supplies available. Their help makes a day at the Center move smoothly with little time wasted in transitions.

Some volunteers can supervise outdoor play activities and indoor play with blocks, dolls or table games. They can help on trips, care for children who become ill until their parents arrive, and add richness and variety to the room by being present and helpful.

Volunteers can be ready to listen to an individual child, talk when a child wants to listen or give added help on projects.

Male volunteers—from junior high school age to adults—can make a special contribution to the children; boys in particular will benefit from a man's manner and presence.

HELPING VOLUNTEERS ON THE JOB

To perform effectively, volunteers must know clearly what they are to do, the job must be within their capacity and they must see the signficance of what they are doing in relation to the total program. Volunteers who are kept from contributing their full services will lose interest.

The job of the paid staff can be eased by volunteers. However, careful organization and planning are necessary to integrate volunteers into the total program.

The volunteer should be placed in a position where he feels most comfortable. This is particularly essential when the children's parents serve as volunteers. These adults may pose problems parallel to those of their children. It is important to assign them to tasks which offer frequent opportunities to succeed. Initial exploration of interests, hobbies and areas of strength and weakness will help to find the right job for the right person.

Inexperienced workers will probably need simple and carefully explained duties initially. They may feel more comfortable with background work until they learn the flow of the total program. New volunteers may relate best to one or two children, reading to them or playing table games. Gradually, as confidence and competence increase, the volunteer may assume larger, less specific responsibilities which allow for more initiative.

Written materials can increase the volunteer's self-sufficiency and reduce his need to interrupt others for directions. Brief summaries giving basic information about the program, the daily schedule, a description of physical facilities, supply storage, ground rules or tips on relationships with children can be valuable.

Some information may usefully be posted, such as a list of all children at the Center and their nicknames, addresses, telephone numbers and the name of the person to be notified in case of emergency. Special assignments could be posted daily.

Routine reminders about procedure might be listed at each activity center. A sign like the following near the snack service area can be helpful:

JUICE TIME TIPS

1. Count the number of people to be served.
2. Set cups, napkins and crackers on tray.
3. The can opener is on a hook on the wall.
4. Check to be sure the pitcher is clean.
5. Have a dampened, clean sponge for spills.
6. After juice, wash pitcher and wipe tray.
7. Check supplies to see that all is in order for tomorrow.

Similar charts can be posted near easels, workbench, and in the library corner. Notices about guidance are helpful: "Children should be allowed to express themselves freely in painting. Adults should not attempt to show them HOW or WHAT to paint." Other notices might discuss safety or materials.

However, thorough initial orientation or detailed printed materials cannot replace personal attention. The wise teacher will find frequent opportunities to talk with volunteers. They will need someone with whom to discuss successes and problems, someone who is a source of advice and counsel.

STAFF MEETINGS

Volunteers should be included in regular meetings of the paid staff when possible. They may contribute ideas and suggestions, and their commitment to the program will be heightened by their participation in planning.

Such meetings also provide an opportunity to increase the volunteer's understanding of child behavior and program goals. A discussion and review of the day's events with emphasis on individual incidents, their meaning and handling, can be significant.

The teacher may use a specific instance as a case study for discussion: "When Tommy hit Mary, I did such-and-such. . . . What if I had done . . . .?" This kind of dialogue gives professionals the chance to relate theory to actual practice.

Reviews present natural opportunities to focus on individual children, cite gains they make—everyone needs the stimulus of seeing progress—and identify children who need special help. Youngsters will benefit when all adults adopt a consistent approach.

Meetings also enable the teacher to discuss future activities. All participants should understand why something new is being introduced or why a particular experience is planned. Unless the basic goals of activities are understood, teaching opportunities may be missed and activity may degenerate into busy work.

PROBLEMS IN VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION

The anticipation of problems that may occur in a volunteer program will prepare staff members to meet these situations constructively.

One potential problem lies in the relationship between professionals and volunteers. Many professionals are reluctant to accept the idea of volunteer participation. They are uncertain of the volunteer's competence, they resent the extra effort involved in supervision—effort they believe can better be channeled in personal work with children.

With the increased professionalization of the health and social welfare fields, many volunteers grow increasingly sensitive about their amateur status. "If you could be working professionally on a full-time basis, you would be," is the attitude one volunteer reported as characteristic of some professionals toward her volunteer work.

On the other hand, some volunteers are tactless, aggressive, thoughtless or irresponsible. Some, particularly those who have worked in community organizations, may condescend to the professional. Thus, some separate briefings for both professionals and volunteers on their mutual relationships may prove desirable.

In talking to professionals, the Center administrator should emphasize the value of volunteer work, not only in the Center but in achieving acceptance and support from the community. Professionals may be encouraged to give merited praise generously, to look for strengths and to correct tactfully or smooth over what appears to be inappropriate behavior. The wise staff member will avoid professional jargon when talking to volunteers and avoid behavior that might seem patronizing .

Volunteers should be given an idea of the seriousness of the professional's work. A regular program of in-service training involving conferences and suggested readings may improve the level of volunteer skills and increase volunteer understanding of the professional's problems and concerns.

Another problem may arise in the motivation of some volunteers. Status seekers may volunteer for the prestige of volunteering, but will probably resign when they become aware of the commitment required.

More difficult to assess and handle effectively may be those well-intentioned individuals with "Lady Bountiful" complexes whose thinly-veiled condescension is sensed by those they should help. Such individuals may be called "do-gooders" by the neighborhood; their pious airs may irritate the professionals; their effectiveness is likely to be limited. However, they may insist on continuing with their volunteer work. Discussions—subtle or frank—with a diplomatic director may help encourage desirable attitudes in some of these volunteers. Others will have to be placed in positions of little personal contact with neighborhood residents.

Adults who volunteer only to alleviate personal emotional needs should be refused. Such people can block a child's need for growth and independence. Volunteers must be chosen for what they can give to children; those who expect to receive should be eased out of the program.

All volunteers must be carefully screened to ensure that they are persons of good character. Children must be protected by the careful selection of adults to work with them.

A final problem concerns the involvement of parents who volunteer to serve the Center. It may be hard for a parent to remain neutral if her child is involved in a dispute. And, children often have trouble sharing their parents with other children and accepting them in a new role of helper to all the children. Both potential difficulties can be averted by separating parents from their own children whenever possible. However, parents should be encouraged to serve even if this separation is impractical; the value of parent participation warrants the risks involved.

VOLUNTEER SATISFACTIONS AND REWARDS

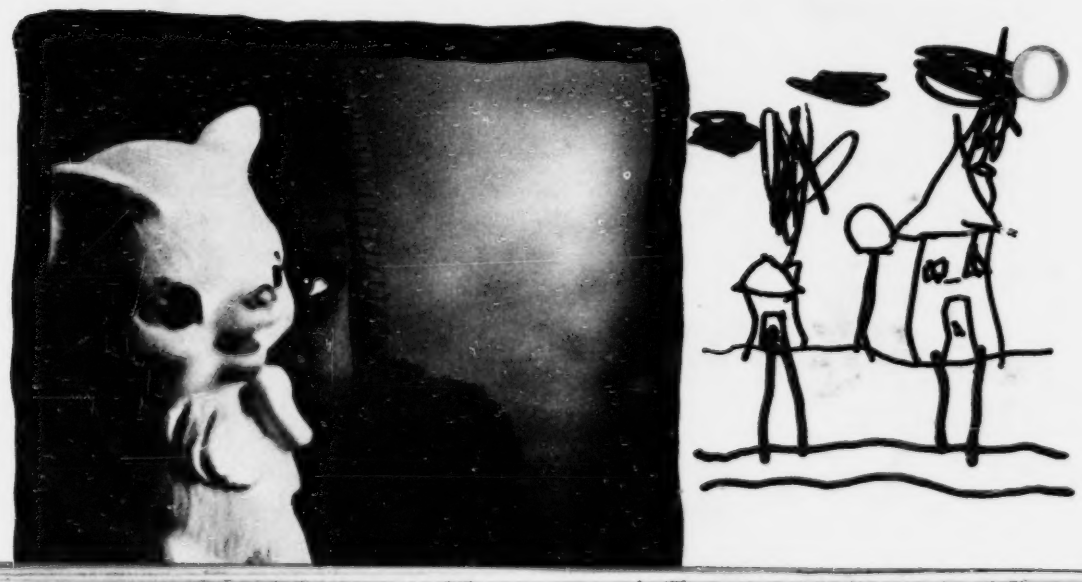
Each volunteer, however dedicated, needs frequent encouragement and praise for his service. A major satisfaction to a volunteer comes from his acceptance as a trusted colleague by valued co-workers. Another stems from the realization he has contributed to the progress and development of individual children. Professionals should make a conscious effort to express their acceptance of volunteers as co-equals, and to help them perceive the nature of the progress achieved. Volunteers must know initially something of the status and problems of the children; they must have a realistic idea of the level of development to be expected from each child, realizing that it will probably be different from progress made by more fortunate children.

After this preparation, the volunteer will be able to understand and appreciate growth and development when it does appear.

The director of a Center may set aside specific times for reviewing volunteer participation and for seeing that volunteers receive merited praise and encouragement regularly. A program with a built-in feature to require regular evaluation of volunteer contribution and provide a chance to express appreciation will help to overcome the tendency to take volunteers for granted.

Some encouragement and guidance can be given during staff meetings; some in individual conferences. At the end of the session, Centers may wish to show their appreciation by giving a luncheon, tea or dinner for the volunteers.

Whatever the method, the successful Center will demonstrate eagerly and often its appreciation of volunteers whose sole wage is the satisfaction derived from helping the Child Development Center achieve its goals.



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